



CHAPTER I.

A strange thing happened at the old fort during the still watches of the night. Even now, at 9 in the morning, no one seemed to be in possession of the exact circumstances. The officer of the day was engaged in an investigation, and all that appeared to be generally known was the bald statement that the sentry on No. 5 had fired at somebody or other about half after 3; that he had fired by order of the officer of the day, who was on his post at the time, and that now he flatly refused to talk about the matter.

Garrison curiosity, it is perhaps needless to say, was rather stimulated than lulled by this announcement. An unusual number of officers were chatting about headquarters when Colonel Maynard came over to his office. Several ladies, too, who had hitherto shown but languid interest in the morning music of the band, had taken the trouble to stroll down to the old quadrangle, ostensibly to see grand mounting. Mrs. Maynard was almost always on her piazza at this time, and her lovely daughter was almost sure to be at the gate with two or three young fellows longing about her. This morning, however, not a soul appeared in front of the colonel's quarters.

Guard mounting at the fort was not held until 9 o'clock, contrary to the somewhat general custom at other posts in our scattered army. Colonel Maynard had ideas of his own upon the subject, and it was his theory that everything worked more smoothly if he had finished a leisurely breakfast before beginning office work of any kind, and neither the colonel nor his family cared to breakfast before 8 o'clock. In view of the fact that Mrs. Maynard had borne that name but a very short time, and that her knowledge of army life dated only from the month of May, the garrison was disposed to consider her entitled to much latitude of choice in such matters, even while it did say that she was old enough to be above bridled sentiment. The women folk at the fort were of opinion that Mrs. Maynard was 50. It must be conceded that she was over 40; also that this was her second entry into the bonds of matrimony.

That no one should now appear on the colonel's piazza was obviously a disappointment to several people. In some way or other most of the breakfast tables at the post had been enlivened by accounts of the mysterious shooting. The soldiers gazed the rounds with the "spice cart," the butcher and grocer and baker from town, the old milk woman with her glistening cans, had all served as news-mongers from kitchen to kitchen, and the story that came in with the coffee to the lady of the house had lost nothing in bulk or bravery. The groups of officers chatting and smoking in front of headquarters gained accessions every moment, while the ladies seemed more absorbed in chat and confidences than in the sweet music of the band.

What fairly exasperated some men was the fact that the old officer of the day was not out on the parade where he belonged. Only the new incumbent was standing there in staccato pose as the band trooped along the line, and the fact that the colonel had sent out word that the ceremony would proceed without Captain Chester only served to add fuel to the flame of popular conjecture. It was known that the colonel was holding a consultation with closed doors with the old officer of the day, and never before since he came to the regiment had the colonel been known to look so pale and strange as when he glanced out for just one moment and called his orderly. The soldier sprang up, saluted, received his message, and, with every eye following him, sped off toward the old stone guardhouse. In three minutes he was on his way back, accompanied by a corporal and private of the guard in full dress uniform.

"That's Leary, the man who fired the shot," said Captain Wilton to his senior lieutenant, who stood by his side. "Belongs to B company, doesn't he?" queried the subaltern. "Seems to me I have heard Captain Armitage say he was one of his best men."

"Yes. He's been in the regiment as long as I can remember. What on earth can the colonel want him for? Near as I can learn, he only fired by Chester's order."

"And neither of them knows what he fired at." "It was perhaps 10 minutes before Private Leary came forth from the doorway of the colonel's office, nodded to the corporal, and raising their white gloved hands in salute to the group of officers the two men tossed their rifles to the right shoulder and strode back to the guard."

Another moment, and the colonel himself opened his door and appeared in the hallway. He stopped abruptly, turned back and spoke a few words in low tone, then hurried through the groups at the entrance, looking at no man, avoiding their glances and giving faint and impatient return to the soldierly salutations that greeted him. The sweat was beaded on his forehead, his lips were white and his face full of a trouble and dismay no man had ever seen there before. He spoke to no one, but walked rapidly toward, entered and closed the gate and door behind him.

For a moment there was silence in the group. Few men in the service were better loved and honored than the veteran soldier who commanded the infantry, and it was with genuine concern that his officers saw him so deeply and painfully affected, for affected he certainly was. Never before had his cheery voice denied them a cordial "Good morning, gentlemen." Never before had his blue eyes flinched. He had been with his comrades and commander in years of frontier service, and his bachelor home had been the rendezvous of all genial spirits when in garrison. They had missed him sorely when he went abroad on long leave the previous

year and were almost indignant when they received the news that he had met his fate in Italy and would return married. "She" was the widow of a wealthy New Yorker who had been dead some three years only, and though over 40 did not look her years to masculine eyes when she reached the fort in May.

After knowing her a week the garrison had decided to the man that the colonel had done wisely. Mrs. Maynard was charming, courteous, handsome and accomplished. Only among the women were there still a few who resented their colonel's capture, and some of these, oblivious of the fact that they had tempted him with relations of their own, were sententious and severe in their condemnation of second marriage, for the colonel, too, was indulging in a second experiment. Of his first only one man in the regiment besides the commander could tell anything, and he, to the just indignation of almost everybody, would not discuss the subject. It was rumored that in the old days when Maynard was senior captain and Chester junior subaltern in their former regiment the two had very little in common. It was known that the first Mrs. Maynard, while still young and beautiful, had died abroad. It was hinted that the resignation of a dashing lieutenant of the regiment, which was synchronous with her departure for foreign shores, was demanded by his brother officers, but it was useless asking Captain Chester. He could not tell, and wasn't it odd—here was Chester again, the only man in the colonel's confidence in an hour of evident trouble.

"By Jove! What's gone wrong with the chief?" was the first exclamation from one of the older officers. "I never saw him look so besken."

As no explanation suggested itself, they began edging in toward the office. The door stood open, a handbell banged, a clerk darted in from the sergeant major's rooms, and Captain Chester was revealed seated at the colonel's desk. This in itself was sufficient to induce several officers to stroll in and look inquiringly around. Captain Chester, merely nodding, went on with some writing at which he was engaged.

After a moment's awkward silence and uneasy glancing at one another the party seemed to arrive at the conclusion that it was time to speak. The band had ceased, and the new guard had marched away behind its pealing bugles. Lieutenant Hall winked at his comrades, strolled hesitatingly over to the desk, balanced unsteadily on one leg, and with his hands sticking in his trousers pockets, and his fringed cap swinging from protruding thumb and forefinger, cleared his throat, and with marked lack of confidence accosted his absorbed superior: "Colonel gone home?"

"Didn't you see him?" was the uncomprehending reply, and the captain did not deign to raise his head or eyes. "Well—er—yes. I suppose I did," said Mr. Hall, shifting uncomfortably to his other leg and prodding the floor with the toe of his boot.

"Then that wasn't what you wanted to know, is preme," said Captain Chester, signing his name with a vicious dash of the pen and bringing his fist down with a thump on the blotting pad, while he wheeled around in his chair and looked squarely up into the perturbed features of the junior.

"No, it wasn't," answered Mr. Hall in an injured tone, while an audible snicker at the door added to his sense of discomfort. "What I mainly wanted was to know if I could go to town."

"That matter is easily arranged, Mr. Hall. All you have to do is to get out of that uncomfortable and unsoldierly position, stand in the attitude in which you are certainly more at home and infinitely more picturesque, proffer your request in respectful words, and there is no question as to the result."

"Oh, you're in command, then?" said Mr. Hall, slowly wriggling into the position of the soldier and flushing through his bronzed cheeks. "I thought the colonel might be only gone for a minute."

"The colonel may not be back for a week, but you're here for parade drills all the same, and—Mr. Hall!" he called as the young officer was turning away. The latter faced about again.

"Was Mr. Jerrold going with you to town?" "Yes, sir. He was to drive me in his dogcart, and it's over here now."

"Mr. Jerrold cannot go—at least not until I have seen him."

"Why, captain, he got the colonel's permission at breakfast this morning."

"That is true, no doubt, Mr. Hall." And the captain dropped his sharp and captious manner, and his voice fell as though in sympathy with the cloud that settled on his face. "I cannot explain matters just now. There are reasons why the permission is withdrawn from the time being. The adjutant will notify him." And Captain Chester turned to his desk again as the new officer of the day, guardbook in hand, entered to make his report.

"The usual orders, captain," said Chester as he took the book from his hand and looked over the list of prisoners. Then, in bold and rapid strokes, he wrote across the page the customary certificate of the old officer of the day, winding up with this remark: "He also inspected guard and visited sentries between 3 and 3:35 a. m. The firing at 3:30 a. m. was by his order."

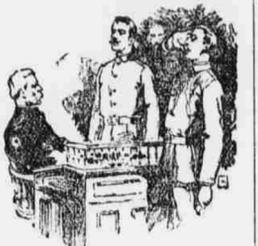
Meantime these officers who had entered and who had no immediate duty to perform were standing or seated around the room, but all observing profound silence. For a moment or two no sound was heard but the scratching of the captain's pen. Then, with some embarrassment and hesitancy, he laid it down and glanced around him.

"Has any one here anything to ask—any business to transact?" Two or three mentioned some routine matters that required the action of the post commander, but did so reluctantly, as though they preferred to await the

orders of the colonel himself. Captain Wilton indeed spoke his sentiments: "I wanted to see Colonel Maynard about getting two men of my company relieved from extra duty, but as he isn't here I fancy I had better wait."

"Not at all. Who are your men? Have it done at once, Mr. Adjutant, and supply their places from my company if need be. Now, is there anything else?"

The group was apparently "nonplussed," as the adjutant afterward put it, by such unlooked for complacency on the part of the usually crochety senior



"Has any one here anything to ask?"

captain. Still, no one offered to lead the others and leave the room. After a moment's nervous rapping with his knuckles on the desk Captain Chester again abruptly spoke: "Gentlemen, I am sorry to inconvenience you, but if there is nothing more that you desire to see me about I shall go on with some other matters, which, pardon me, do not require your presence."

At this very broad hint the party slowly found their legs, and with much wonderment and not a few resentful glances at their temporary commander the officers sauntered to the doorway. There, however, several stopped again, still reluctant to leave in the face of so pervading a mystery, for Wilton turned.

"Am I to understand that Colonel Maynard has left the post to be gone any length of time?" he asked.

"He has not yet gone. I do not know how long he will be gone or how soon he will start. For pressing personal reasons he has turned over the command to me, and if he decide to remain away of course some field officer will be ordered to come to headquarters. For a day or two you will have to worry along with me, but I shan't worry you more than I can help. I've got mystery and mischief enough here to keep me busy, God knows. Just ask Sloat to come back here to me, will you? And, Wilton, I did not mean to be abrupt with you. I'm all upset today. Mr. Adjutant, notify Mr. Jerrold at once that he must not leave the post until I have seen him. It is the colonel's last order. Tell him so."

CHAPTER II.

The night before had been unusually dark. A thick veil of clouds overspread the heavens and hid the stars. Moon there was none, for the faint silver crescent that gleamed for a moment through the swift sailing wisps of vapor had dropped beneath the horizon soon after tattoo, and the mournful strains of "Taps," borne on the rising wind, seemed to signal "extinguish lights" to the entire garrison as well as to Fort Sibley. There was a dance of some kind at the quarters of one of the staff officers living far up the row on the southern terrace. Chester heard the laughter and chat as the young officers and their convoy of matrons and maids came tripping homeward after midnight. He was a crusty old bachelor, to use his own description, and rarely ventured into these scenes of social gaiety, and besides he was officer of the day, and it was a theory he was fond of expounding to juniors that when on guard no soldier should permit himself to be drawn from the scene of his duties.

With his books and his pipe Chester whiled away the lonely hours of the early night and wondered if the wind would blow up a rain or disperse the clouds entirely. Toward 1 o'clock a light, bounding footstep approached his door, and the portal flew open as a trim built young fellow, with laughing eyes, and an air of exuberant health and spirits, came briskly in. It was Rollins, the junior second lieutenant of the regiment and Chester's own and only post—so said the envious others. He was barely a year out of leading strings at the Point and as full of hope and pluck and mischief as a colt. Moreover, he was frank and teachable, said Chester, and didn't come to him with the idea that he had nothing to learn and less to do. The boy won upon his gruff captain to the very start, and to the incredulous delight of the whole regiment, within six months the old cynic had taken him into his heart and home, and Mr. Rollins occupied a pleasant room under Chester's roof-tree and was the sole accredited sharer of the captain's mess. To a youngster just entering service, whose ambition it was to stick to business and make a record for zeal and efficiency, these were manifest advantages.

There were men in the regiment to whom such close communion with a watchful senior would have been most embarrassing, and Mr. Rollins' predecessor as second lieutenant of Chester's company was one of these. Mr. Jerrold was a happy man when promotion took him from under the wing of Crusty Jake and landed him in Company B. More than that, it came just at a time when, after four years of loneliness and isolation at an up river stockade, his new company and his old one, together with four others from the regiment, were ordered to join headquarters and the band at the most delightful station in the northwest. Here Mr. Rollins had reported for duty during the previous autumn, and here they were with troops of other arms of the service, enjoying the close proximity of all the good things of civilization.

Chester looked up, with a quizzical smile, as his "pebe" came in: "Well, sir, how many dances had you with Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt? Not many, I fancy, with Mr. Jerrold. Good fellow, everything as usual. By gad! some good fellow could make a colossal fortune in buying that young man at my valuation and selling him at his own."

"Oh, come, now, captain," laughed Rollins, "Jerrold's no such slouch as you make him out. He's lazy, and he likes to spoon, and he puts up with a good deal of petting from the girls—who wouldn't it be could get it—but he is jolly and big hearted and don't put on any airs—with us, at least—and the mess like him first rate. 'Tain't his fault that he's handsome and a regular lady killer. You must admit that he

had a pretty tough four years of it up there at that cursed old Indian graveyard, and it's only natural he should enjoy getting here, where there are theaters and concerts and operas and dances and dinners—"

"Yes, dances and dinners and laughter, all delightful, I know, but no excuse for a man's neglecting his main duty, as he is doing and has been ever since we got here. Any other time the colonel would have straightened him out, but no use trying it now, when both women in his household are as big fools about the man as anybody in town—bigger, unless I'm a born idiot." And Chester rose excitedly.

"I suppose he had Miss Renwick pretty much to himself tonight?" he presently demanded, looking angrily and searchingly at his junior, as though half expecting him to dodge the question.

"Oh, yes. Why not? It's pretty evident she would rather dance and be with him than with any one else. So what can a fellow do? Of course we ask her to dance and all that, and I think he wants us to, but I cannot help feeling rather a bore to her, even if she is only 18, and there are plenty of pleasant girls in the garrison who don't get any too much attention, now we're so near a big city, and I like to be with them."

"Yes, and it's the right thing for you to do, youngster. That's one trait I despise in Jerrold. When we were up there at the stockade two winters ago, and Captain Gray's little girl was there, he hung around her from morning till night, and the poor little thing fairly beamed and blossomed with delight. Look at her now, man! He doesn't go near her. He hasn't had the decency to take her a walk, or drive or anything since we got here. He began from the moment we came with that gang in town. He was simply devoted to Miss Beaulieu until Alice Renwick came. Then he dropped her like a hot brick. By the eternal Rollins, he hasn't got off with that old love yet, you mark my words. There's Indian blood in her veins and a look in her eye that makes me wriggle sometimes. I watched her last night at parade when she drove out here with that copper faced old squaw, her mother. For all her French and Italian education and her years in New York and Paris that girl's got a wild streak in her somewhere. She sat there watching him as the officers marched to the front, and then her, as he went up and joined Miss Renwick, and there was a gleam of her white teeth and a flash in her black eyes that made me think of the leap of a knife from the sheath. Not but what 'twould serve him right if she did play him some devil's trick. It's his own doing. Were any people out from town?" he suddenly asked.

"Yes, half a dozen or so," answered Mr. Rollins, who was pulling off his boots and inserting his feet into easy slippers, while old "Crusty" tramped excitedly up and down the floor. "Most of them staid out here, I think. Only one team went back across the bridge."

"Whose was that?" "The Suttons," I believe. Young Cub Sutton was out with his sister and another girl."

"There's another d—d fool!" growled Chester. "That boy has \$10,000 a year of his own, a beautiful home that will be his, a doting mother and sister, and everything wealth can buy, and yet, by gad, he's unhappy because he can't be a poor devil of a lieutenant, with nothing but drills, debts, and rifle practice to enliven him. That's what brings him out here all the time. He'd swap places with you in a minute. Isn't he very thick with Jerrold?"

"Oh, yes, rather. Jerrold entertains him a good deal."

where his perturbed spirit was soon soothed in sleep. His conscience being clear and his health so sweet, there were no deep cares to keep him tossing on a restless pillow.

To Chester, however, sleep was impossible. He tramped the piazza a full hour before he felt placid enough to go and inspect his guard. The sentries were calling 3 o'clock and the wind had died away as he started on his round. Dark as was the night, he carried no lantern. The main garrison was well lighted by lamps, and the road circling the old fort was broad, smooth and bordered by a stone coping wall where it skirted the precipitous descent into the river bottom. As he passed down the plank walk west of the quadrangle, wherein lay the old barracks and the stone quarters of the commanding officer and the low one-storied row of bachelor dens, he could not help noting the silence and peace of the night.

Not a light was visible at any window as he strode down the line. The challenge of the sentry at the old stone tower sounded unnecessarily sharp and loud, and his response "Officer of the day" was lower than usual, as though rebuking the unseasonably out. The guard came scrambling out and formed hurriedly to receive him, but the captain's inspection was of the briefest kind. Barely glancing along the prison corridor to see that the bars were in place, he turned back into the night and made for the line of posts along the river bank.

The sentry at the high bridge across the gorge and the next one, well around to the southeast flank, were successively visited and briefly questioned as to his instructions, and then the captain plodded steadily on until he came to the sharp bend around the outermost angle of the fort and found himself passing behind the quarters of the commanding officer, a substantial two storied stone house, with mansard roof and dormer windows.

The road in the rear was some 10 feet below the level of the parade inside the quadrangle, and consequently, as the house faced the parade, what was the ground floor from that front became the second story at the rear. The kitchen, storeroom and servants' rooms were on this lower stage and opened upon the road, an outer stairway ran up to the center door at the back, but at the east and west flanks of the house the stone walls stood without port or window except those above the eaves—the dormers. Light and air in abundance streamed through the broad Venetian windows north and south when light and air were needed. This night, as usual, all was tightly closed below, all darkness aloft as he glanced up at the dormers high above his head. As he did so his foot struck a sudden and sturdy obstacle. He stumbled and pitched heavily forward and found himself sprawling at full length upon a ladder lying on the ground almost in the middle of the roadway.

"—a three painters!" he growled between his set teeth. "They leave their infernal mantraps around in the very hope of catching me, I believe. Now, who but a painter would have left a ladder in such a place as this?"

Rising ruefully and rubbing a bruised knee with his hand, he limped painfully ahead a few steps until he came to the side wall of the colonel's house. Here a plank walk passed from the roadway along the western wall until almost on a line with the front piazza, where by a flight of steps it was carried up to the level of the parade. Here he paused a moment to don off his clothes and rearrange his belt and sword. He stood leaning against the wall and facing the gray stone gable end of the row of old fashioned quarters that branched the parade upon the southwest. All was still darkness and silence.

"Confound this sword!" he muttered again. "The thing made rattle and racket enough to wake the dead. Wonder if I disturbed anybody at the colonel's?"

As though in answer to his suggestion there suddenly appeared, high on the blank wall before him, the reflection of a faint light. Had a little night lamp been turned on in the front room of the upper story? The gleam came from the north window on the side. He saw plainly the shadow of the pretty lace curtains looped loosely back. Then the shade was gently raised, and there was for an instant the silhouette of a slender hand and wrist and the shadow of a lace bordered sleeve. Then the light receded, as though carried back across the room, went up, though slowly extinguished, and the last shadows showed the curtains still looped back, the rolling shade still raised.

"I thought so," he growled. "One tumble like that is enough to wake the sleepers, let alone a love sick girl who is probably dreaming over Jerrold's parting words. She is spirited and blue blooded enough to have more sense, too, than that superb brunette. Ah, Miss Alice, I wonder if you think that fellow's love worth having? It is two hours since he left you—more than that—and here you are awake yet—cannot sleep, want more air and have to come and raise your shade. No such warm night either." These were his reflections as he picked up his offending sword and more slowly and cautiously now groped his way along the western terrace. He passed the row of bachelor quarters and was well out beyond the limits of the fort before he came upon the next sentry—No. 5—and recognized in the sharp "Who comes there?" and the stern rattle of the bayonet as it dropped to the charge the well known challenge of Private Leary, one of the oldest and most reliable soldiers in the regiment.

"All right on your post, Leary?" he asked after having given the counter-signal.

"All right, I think, sir, though if the captain had asked me that half an hour ago I'd not have said so. It was so dark I couldn't see my hand afore me face, sir, but about half past 2 I was walking very slow down back of the quarters which just close by Lieutenant Jerrold's back gate I seen something moving, an as I come softly along it riz up, an sure I thought 'twas the loot'nant himself, whin he seemed to catch sight o' me or hear me, an he backed inside the gate an shut it. I was sure 'twas he, he was so tall an slimlike, an so I never said a word until I got to the hallway, picked up the first forage cap he laid hands on and banged himself out of the front door."

Mr. Rollins remained for some moments in the same attitude, still gazing abstractedly at the rug and listening to the nervous tramp of his senior officer on the piazza without. Then he slowly and thoughtfully went to his room,

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"Hm! Odd thing that, Leary! Why didn't you challenge at first?" "Sure, sir, he left inside the fence quick as iver we set eyes on each other. He was bendin down, an I thought it was one of the hound pups when I first sighted him."

"And he hasn't been around since?" "No, sir, nor nobody till the officer of the day came along."

Chester walked away puzzled. Night was a quiet and orderly garrison. Slight prowlers had never been heard from, especially over here at the south end, and southwest fronts. The enlisted men going to or from town passed across the big high bridge or went at once to their own quarters on the east and north. This southwestern terrace behind the bachelors' row was the most secluded spot on the whole post, so much so that when a fire broke out there among the fuel heaps one sharp warrior's night a year ago it had well nigh enveloped the whole line before its existence was discovered. Indeed not until after this occurrence was a sentry posted on that front at all, and once ordered there he had so little to do and was so comparatively sure to be undisturbed that the old soldiers eagerly sought the post in preference to any other and were given it as a peace privilege. For months relief after relief tramped around the fort and found the terrace post as humdrum and silent as an empty church, but this night No. 5 leaped suddenly into notoriety.

Instead of going home, Chester kept on across the plateau and took a long walk on the northern side of the reservation, where the quartermaster's stables and corrals were placed. He was affected by a strange unrest. His talk with Rollins had aroused the memories of years long gone by, of days when he, too, was young and full of hope and faith—aye, full of love—all lavished on one fair girl who knew it well, but gently, almost unconsciously, repelled him. Her heart was wrapped up in another, the Adonis of his day in the gray old sea-barrack garrison. She was a soldier's child, barrack born, simply taught, knowing little of the vice and temptations, the follies and the frauds, of the whirling life of civilization. A good and gentle mother had reared her and been called home. Her father, an officer whose saber arm was left at Molino del Rey, and whose heart was crushed when the loving wife was taken from him, turned to the child who so resembled her and centered there all his remaining love and life. He welcomed Chester to his home and tacitly favored his suit, but in his blindness never saw how a few moonlit strolls on the old moss grown parapet, a few evening dances in the casemates with handsome, wooing, winning Will Forester had done their work. She gave him all the wild, enthusiastic, worshiping love of her girlish heart just about the time Captain and Mrs. Maynard came back from leave, and then he grew cold and negligent there, but lived at Maynard's residence, and one day there came a sensation—a tragedy—and Mrs. Maynard went away and died abroad, and a shocked and broken hearted girl hid her face from all and pined at home, and Mr. Forester's resignation was sent from no one's knew just where, and no one would have cared to know except Maynard. He would have followed him, pistol in hand, but Forester gave him no chance. Years afterward Chester again sought her and offered her his love and his name. It was useless, she told him sadly. She lived only for her father now and would never leave him till he died, and then she prayed she might go too. Memories like this will come up at such times in these same "still watches of the night." Chester was in a moody frame of mind when about half an hour later he came back past the guardhouse. The sergeant was standing near the lighted entrance, and the captain called him:

"There's a ladder lying back of the colonel's quarters on the roadway. Some of those painters let it, I suppose. It's a wonder some of the relics have not broken their necks over it going around tonight. Let the next one pick it up and move it out of the way. Hasn't it been reported?"

"Not to me, sir. Corporal Schreiber has command of this relief, and he has said nothing about it. Here he is, sir."

"Didn't you see it or stumble over it when posting your relief, corporal?" asked Chester.

"No, indeed, sir. I—I think the captain must have been mistaken in thinking it a ladder. We would surely have struck it if it had been."

"No mistake at all, corporal. I lifted it. It is a long, heavy ladder, over 20 feet, I should say."

"There is such a ladder back here, captain," said the sergeant, "but it always hangs on the fence just behind the young officers' quarters—bachelors' row, sir, I mean."

"And that ladder was there an hour ago when I went my rounds," said the corporal earnestly. "I had my hurricane lamp, sir, and saw it on the fence plainly. And there was nothing behind the colonel's at that hour."

Chester turned away, thoughtful and silent. Without a word he walked straight into the quadrangle, past the low line of stone buildings, the offices of the adjutant and quartermaster, the home of the sergeant major, the club and billiard room, past the long piazza shaded row of bachelor quarters and came upon the plank walk at the corner of the colonel's fence. Ten more steps, and he stood stock still at the head of the flight of wooden stairs.

There, dimly visible against the southern sky, its base on the plank walk below him, its top resting upon the eaves midway between the dormer window and the roof of the piazza, so that one could step easily from it into the one or onto the other, was the very ladder that half an hour before was lying on the ground behind the house.

His heart stood still. He seemed powerless to move, even to think. Then a slight noise roused him, and with every nerve tingling he crouched ready for a spring. With quick, agile movements, noiseless as a cat, sinuous and stealthily as a serpent, the dark figure of a man issued from Alice Renwick's chamber window and came gliding down.

One second more, and almost noiselessly he reached the ground, then quickly turned and raised the ladder, stepped with it to the edge of the roadway and peered around the angle as though to see that no sentry was in sight, then vanished with his burden around the corner. Another second, and down the steps went Chester, three at a bound, tipping it in pursuit. Ten seconds

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